

Spain in the New World

Europeans in the early 1500's called the lands across the Atlantic Ocean the New World. Spaniards began settling in this New World. There were some reasons why the different rulers wanted to protect Spain's claim in this new land. First, Spain wanted to extend the rule of Spain. Second, the country wanted the riches and power from having a claim to the New World. The last reason was that they wanted to spread Christianity. To meet these goals, the Spanish rulers planned to establish settlements in the new land.

St. Augustine

One of these settlements, St. Augustine, was on the east coast of Florida. It is the oldest permanent European settlement on the North American continent. Spain sent the Spanish explorer Pedro Menendez to claim this area for Spain. The time was August 28, 1565, the feast day of Saint Augustine. The explorer and his six hundred soldiers and settlers landed at the place of a Timucuan Indian village which Menendez named St. Augustine.

After Menendez had the coast of Florida under Spanish control, he built the town. He established missions for the church and Indians. This settlement of St. Augustine was established before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock fifty-five years later. Over the next two hundred years, pirates and the English attacked St. Augustine. The English explorer, Sir Francis Drake, attacked and burned the settlement in 1586.

Finally, the attacks were coming so frequently that Spain wanted a stone fort built. The fort called Castillo de San Marcos took twenty-three years to build and the settlement never fell to an enemy attack again. In 1763, Spain turned Florida over to England. St. Augustine was under British rule for twenty years. This was the period of time of the American Revolution. During the Revolution, Florida remained loyal to England. St. Augustine was one of two hundred settlements Spain had in the New World before any other country had even one.

France in the New World

News of the Spanish explorations and settlements in the New World spread throughout Europe. The King of France learned that Spain was becoming rich from the wealth of its settlements. He wanted France to become as powerful in land and riches as Spain. The King decided to send French explorers across the Atlantic. This decision by the King began a race between two great rivals - France and Spain - for control of North America.

QUEBEC

The settlement of Quebec, located on a cliff above the St. Lawrence River, was founded by the French explorer Samuel Champlain in 1608. Most of the French settlers made a living by trading with the Indians of the area. They traded kettles, knives, tools, beads, and other goods for furs that the Indians got by trapping beavers. The French started to actively compete with the English for the fur trade. The French were sending the furs back to France. By 1759, the French and English were involved in a war over the territories in the New World.

In the early 1700's, the French built settlements and forts on the Mississippi and northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico. These protected the French from attack by the Spaniards in the northern part of Mexico. The French also built forts and settlements on the Mississippi River farther north.

France now claimed the two great river valleys in North America - those of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence Rivers. Every new settlement strengthened France's hold in the New World.